

How Not to Make Book

"You can't lose," spied a full-page ad by Doubleday & Co. in the New York Times Book Review. "We are so convinced of the appeal these important books will have for you that we are willing to bet that five of them will be best sellers by the first week in May." The terms: if more than one of the six failed to make the Times bestseller list by then, Doubleday promised to send a copy of any one of them "absolutely free" to anybody asking for it.

Last week demands for free copies were still flooding into Doubleday. Only four of the books had qualified as bestsellers by the appointed time: Jean Kerr's *Please Don't Eat the Daisies*, Edna Ferber's *Ice Palace*, Paul I. Wellman's *Ride the Red Earth*, and Robert Lewis Taylor's *The Travels of Jaimie McPheeters*. By also entering two less-likeliest, Kenneth Roberts' *The Battle of Cowpens* and Saunders Redding's *The Lonesome Road*, Doubleday had thought to give its parlay some sporting zest. It succeeded too well. In flowed letters at the rate of 500 a day; out flowed free books. By the time the mails had poured in some 3,000 claims from winning bettors, the publishers nervously stuck a finger in the dike: they took a small ad in one morning's *Times* cautiously announcing that their "offer" (identified only by its date and page in the Book Review) would expire that afternoon, then started getting up a form letter that all bets were off.

British Funhouse

THE DARLING BUDS OF MAY (219 pp.)—H. E. Bates—Atlantic—Little, Brown (\$3.75).

"Larkin, that's me," Pop said . . . Larkin by name, Larkin by nature. What can I do for you? Nice weaver."

"I'm from the office of the Inspector of Taxes."

"Pop stood blank and innocent, staggered by the very existence of such a person."

"Inspector of what?"

"Taxes. Inland Revenue."

"You must have come to the wrong house," Pop said."

Tax collectors and plain readers of *The Darling Buds of May* must respectfully disagree with Pop. The story of how Cedric, the tax man, stays for dinner chez Larkin, and stays and stays only to be subverted by food, drink, love and the Larkin clan's infectious lust for life, makes H. E. (for Herbert Ernest) Bates's novel one of the blithest robustious romps of the year. The book's gusto is all the more remarkable coming from welfare-sated England and from 53-year-old Author (*The Sleepless Moon*) Bates, a writer who in recent years has focused on the somber, the loveless and the violent.

Two Nudes by Rubens. The Larkins are seasonal strawberry pickers, and their way of life might be called Rabelaisian-



Brian Seale

AUTHOR BATES

Taxes make strangers bedfellows.

faire. When Pop vents his heroic belches, he sounds like Charles Laughton playing Henry VIII. Pop is little seen in the strawberry fields, for he roams the countryside on a spivishly freewheeling enterprise called "the scrap iron lark," which nets him a 600% profit, a margin Pop regards as "perfick." Spacious, sportive Ma Larkin furnishes a groaning bed and board, fills her voluminous pink nylon nighties like two nudes by Rubens. Wed only in the sight of the common law, Ma and Pop have six children, only one of whom causes them a smidgen of concern.



Pierre Boulou

AUTHOR DE BEAUVOIR

Bedfellows make strange politics.

Seems that their nubile eldest daughter, Mariette, may become a mother without knowing the exact father.

This is where the tax collector comes in. Cedric is a toothbrush-mustached city mouse with "office-pale hands," as limp as "tired celery." But in Ma and Pop's peasant-shrewd eyes, he is a potential husband, if only they can take his mind off his tax forms and put it on Mariette's still flawless figure. Ma starts fattening up Cedric with goodies from the "frige." Pop rechristens the tax man "Charlie," and plies him with a Rolls-Royce ("half vermouth, quarter whisky, quarter gin, dash of orange bitters") followed by a Chauffeur ("one-third vermouth, one-third whisky, one-third gin, dash of Angostura"). At first day's end, a cocktail-shaken Charlie, decked in Mariette's pajamas, goes to sleep on the billiard table while cooing sweet nothings to the billiard ball in the corner pocket.

"The National Elf Lark." Pop urges the hung-over tax man to put in for sick leave ("the National Elf Lark"), and before long Charlie beds down with Mariette in a field of buttercups. But it is the strawberry-sweet juice and joy of life with Pop and Ma Larkin that truly seduces Charlie. One day it is Pop piloting a real, if secondhand, Rolls-Royce into the yard and grandly announcing, "Ourn." Other times, it is Ma wolfing fish and chips and baying "Turn up the contrast!" toward the ever-playing TV set.

Turning up the contrast is the key to Novelist Bates's pulsing comedy of country manners. He spoofs the planned austerity of the ill-fare state with a rollicking image of the life abundant. He spoofs whey-faced bureaucratic automatons with lusty individualists whose color a Matisse might envy. The joke is funny precisely because the author does not insist on telling it.

At a zany cocktail party at novel's end, with host and guests planting fireworks under each other, Pop Larkin announces his daughter's engagement to Charlie. And Mariette, it turns out, is not pregnant after all. This is the only false alarm in a five-alarm blaze of a book that is just about perfick.

"No More Flies"

THE LONG MARCH (513 pp.)—Simone de Beauvoir—World (\$7.50).

French intellectuals are among the few left in the Western world who still trot out, straight-faced, the kind of cozy Communist maxims that have been wearing whiskers almost as long as the Russians. Samples: "The Chinese government . . . considers truth its soundest ally." "All [Chinese newspapers] are government-supervised . . . There must be the initial phase in which chaos gives way to a rudimentary order." "Russian assistance—as the Chinese leaders make plain in every speech and report—is disinterested." "In [France] . . . the law is determined by the interests of a class," but in China, "justice is made to correspond to the welfare of the people."

These trusting quotations are from